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Introduction

A number of features of contemporary life have arguably led to a more intense focus on the self and our capacity to understand, manage, and shape our "selves." We have been increasingly invited to "serve ourselves" as consumers of supermarket products, fuel, banking, travel, entertainment, and even education. Such self-service provisions are supported by rhetoric of personal choice, individual freedom, self-fulfillment, and initiative. In the contemporary workplace too there is a demand for innovative, flexible, multiskilled, and entrepreneurial workers who have a capacity to self-regulate, monitor their performance, be reflexive, and align themselves with the strategic goals of their organization. There are also increasing numbers of independent workers who do not have organizational allegiances but who are conscious of building their portfolio of skills to maintain their position in the labor market—those who can be described as "entrepreneurs of the self" or "portfolio workers" (Gee, 2000). More broadly, rapid social and technological change; the growth of the knowledge society; and global economic, ecological, and health issues collectively point to the need for significant adaptation, flexibility, and a capacity for personal change. One could go further and argue that contemporary life is characterized by uncertainty and dislocation as people find that their anchoring points for identity and their expectations of life trajectories are challenged and disrupted. Clearly, maintaining a singular, unchanging "self" is unlikely to lead to a satisfying and successful life. Instead, we are told, we need to be able to change in response to the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Accepting the idea that we need to undertake significant personal change over our lifetime raises the question of how such change may come about. Can we be the sole agents of our own change? If so, what do we need to think, do, say, or feel to effect this change? If not, to what extent are we dependent on others to effect self-change? What shared activities promote self-change? Is our self-change dependent on change in others? What kinds of relationships with others are necessary for self-change? By changing ourselves, are we able to change our circumstances and those of others? What is the role of the educator or manager in the process of change? (see Tennant, 1998).

Such questions are invariably framed within an explicit or implicit theoretical framework for understanding the self, subjectivity, or identity. One aim of this book is to explore different ways of conceptualizing these terms. This is done by examining some of the key theoretical conceptions of the self, but it is also done by exploring existing techniques, processes, and practices in education, the helping professions, and organizations that are aimed at helping people "work on themselves." Such practices, or "technologies of the self," contain within them assumptions about self and identity and the place of society and culture in personal formation and change.

Ashmore and Jussim (1997) provide a historical overview of the expanding interest in self and identity, from the time of William James's "The Consciousness of Self" (which appears in his seminal work *The Principles of Psychology,* 1890) to the latter part of the twentieth century, during which, from 1974 to 1994, over thirty thousand articles were published on the theme of self and identity in psychology journals alone. Beyond psychology there has been much commentary on self and identity in such diverse fields as sociology, organizational studies, anthropology, cultural studies, and education. A journal dedicated to this theme, the eponymous *Self and Identity,* commenced publication in 2002. As the editors explain, they are attempting to reach a

broad, cross-disciplinary audience: "*Self and Identity* will appeal to researchers in sociology, communication, family studies, anthropology, social work, psychiatry, and other social and behavioural sciences as well. Our disciplines have labored too long unaware of or unconcerned with the others, and I hope that the journal can provide a bridge among them" (Leary and Forest, 2002, p. 2).

A similar appeal for interdisciplinary work in this area is made by the editors of the newly named journal *Subjectivity* (which, significantly, is a continuation of the *International Journal of Critical Psychology*):

> *Subjectivity* is an international, transdisciplinary journal that will explore the social, cultural, historical and material processes, dynamics and structures of human experience. As topic, problem and resource, notions of subjectivity are relevant to many disciplines, including cultural studies, sociology, social theory, science and technology studies, geography, anthropology, gender and feminist studies and psychology. The journal will bring together scholars from across the social sciences and the humanities in a collaborative project to identify the processes by which subjectivities are produced, explore subjectivity as a locus of social change, and examine how emerging subjectivities remake our social worlds. Our aim, then, is a re-prioritization of subjectivity as a primary category of social, cultural, psychological, historical and political analysis [Blackman et al., 2008, p. 1].

It is worth noting that both of these journals point to how the three interrelated concepts of self, identity, and subjectivity are deployed in diverse and overlapping ways in psychology, sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies. As the reader may have anticipated, these concepts have not emerged from a singular

theoretical perspective or even a singular disciplinary perspective. This chapter comprises an initial exploration of these concepts with a view to understanding the issues each of them signals. I am not providing the reader with a definitive position, but rather a way of exploring different ways we can imagine our "selves," how we are formed and sustained, and the nature of our relationship to others and the broader culture in which we live.

The Self

The dominant image of the self in everyday life and in psychology in particular has been that of a "ghost in the machine" (see Koestler, 1967), which refers to the locus of our experience, thoughts, intentions, actions, and beliefs; it is the inner psychological entity that owns our unique individual biography and our sense of coherence and continuity over time. Although it is probably fair to say that this image underlies much of the theory, research, and practice of psychology (see Allport, 1961; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1967), it has not gone unchallenged both within psychology and from without. And psychology certainly cannot lay claim to a monopoly on the topic of the self. Danziger (1997), for example, makes the point that psychologists were relative latecomers to the topic of the self, with the term being in vogue initially in such neighboring disciplinary areas as sociology, philosophy, literary studies, and history. Indeed he points out that the self was a taboo topic in psychology for many decades, especially with the dominance of behaviorism, which rejected, on epistemological grounds, any attempt to uncover inner mental states (see, for example, Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 1973). Moreover, well before the advent of psychology as a discipline there had emerged, in Western societies at least, specifically psychological ways of thinking about humans and their everyday world. Danziger draws our attention to this by distinguishing between small-"p" psychology and Psychology with a capital "P":

> Before there could be anything for the discipline of psychology to study, people had to develop a psychological way of understanding themselves, their conduct, and their experiences. They had to develop specifically psychological concepts and categories for making themselves intelligible to themselves. Only then did aspects of people's lives present themselves as potential objects of psychological study, rather than, say, objects for religious meditation or moral disputation. The history of small-p psychology, therefore, is not the history of primitive "anticipations" of later scientific formulations but the history of the emergence of those discursive objects without which the science of psychology would have had nothing to study [Danziger, 1997, p. 139].

This is a significant claim because it implies that the self is not a natural entity that can be objectively studied. It has a historical rather than a natural status. That is, unlike objects in the physical world, the self is not something that is independent of the way we think, theorize, and talk about it. This claim of course runs counter to much of the early work in the social sciences, which assumed that the self was an object of knowledge that could be known empirically like any other natural phenomenon. Danziger (1997) emphasizes the radical nature of this view at the time when it was first put forward in the philosophical writings of John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694/1959). By considering the self to be an object of knowledge and the source of the unity of the human individual, Locke challenged the hitherto prevailing view that the immortal soul was the key to the unity of the human individual. He was replacing a religious view with a secular view, and this stirred up a sustained controversy (Danziger, p. 141). It opened up the possibility of seeing the self not as sinful and evil but as something positive that can be sustained and nurtured through self-reflection, self-monitoring,

and even "self-love." Deviance took on a new angle: it was no longer seen in terms of sinners falling short of divine goodness; instead it was seen as a failure in the monitoring mechanism of the self. This view of the self as having an executive function dominated early-twentieth-century thinking about the self. It is the basis of the idea that the self is composed of the "I," who is the knower, and the "me" or "object," which can be known both by me and by others as a cluster of attributes and actions. This distinction between "I" and "me" is typically attributed to William James's chapter "The Consciousness of Self," which appeared in his seminal work, *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Thus self-evaluation is a matter of the "I," with its executive function, making judgments about the "me," and self-evaluation takes on a moral value: "The objectified self that persons now harbor within them is above all an object of approval and disapproval, both by others and the person herself. The self is always conceived as an object of variable worth, and therefore the desire to raise or maintain its worth comes to be regarded as an identifiable human motive" (Danziger, p. 145).

In therapy and everyday life, self-improvement is now a core cultural value and there exist across the spectrum of human activities numerous practices and procedures that guide individuals to reflect upon and evaluate themselves and their thoughts, feelings, and conduct. Consequently, the vocabulary of self-related constructs and processes has expanded. Leary and Tangney (2003) have tabulated sixty-six "self-" terms employed in over 150,000 PsycInfo abstracts up to June 2001. The most frequent were *self-concept*, *self-esteem*, *self-control*, *self-disclosure*, *self-actualization*, *self-monitoring*, *self-confidence*, and *self-awareness*. For each of these terms there are practices aimed at achieving a normative ideal—it is good to have a stable or realistic concept of oneself, it is good to be self-aware, self-disclosure is a good thing, and so on. Despite the variety of practices, a common normative ideal is the unified, coherent, integrated self. Thus the healthy self is unified rather

than split, conscious rather than hidden, and continuous rather than discontinuous with the past.

Identity

Gleason (1983), in documenting the semantic history of identity, observes its ubiquity, elusiveness, and ambiguity. For example, it refers to both *sameness*, as in one's identification with, say, an ethnic group, and *uniqueness*, in the sense that we use the term to describe our particular individual identity. Identity is used to refer to the continuity and unity of the individual over time, but it is also used to refer to multiple and sometimes divided, or at least conflicted, individuals. Gleason distinguishes between the way identity is conceptualized by psychologists such as Erikson (1959), in whose view it is an internal psychological state and a source of continuity in the person, and the way it is understood by sociologists such as Cooley (1922) and Mead (1934/1972), and later Goffman (1971) and Berger (1963), who see identity as socially produced and subject to change with changing circumstances. According to Gleason, "In the case of identity, Erikson insists that an inner continuity of personality endures through all the changes the individual undergoes in passing through the stages of the life cycle, while the interactionists envision a flickering succession of identities adopted and shed according to the requirements of different social situations" (p. 919).

Of particular note is the way the "interactionists" (Cooley and Mead) shifted from an initial use of the term *self* to the term *identity*, perhaps for the reason that it seemed a more promising category with which to explore the relationship between the individual and society. Its use in everyday language also seemed to capture the emerging concerns faced by citizens of Western liberal democracies—at first the concern with how to establish personal identity in an impersonal mass society dominated by the consumption of mass goods; then the concern with how marginalized

groups can have their identities recognized and respected in a society dominated by an identity coded as male, white, able-bodied, and heterosexual; and finally the concern with establishing and maintaining an identity in a diverse and ever-changing society. The adoption of identity rather than self as an explanatory category is thus associated with a growing critique of Western liberal democracy, with its mass-produced goods and its norms of conduct. The move to identity thus entails a politicization of the previously "neutral" psychological term *self*. It is also symptomatic of a shift from the private realm of internal states to the public realm of performances in the social world, as depicted by Gee (2000):

> When any human being acts and interacts in a given context, others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain "kind of person" or even as several different "kinds" at once. . . . A person might be recognized as being a certain kind of radical feminist, homeless person, overly macho male, "yuppie," street gang member, community activist, academic, kindergarten teacher, "at risk" student, and so on and so forth, through countless possibilities. The "kind of person" one is recognized as "being," at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable. Being recognized as a certain "kind of person," in a given context, is what I mean here by "identity." In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected not to their "internal states" but to their performances in society [Gee, p. 99].

Gee goes on to list four ways to view identity: as a state of nature (for example, being an identical twin); as an institutional position (for example, being a bank manager); as a discursive position (for example, being recognized and talked

about by others as being a charismatic person); and finally as an affiliation with a group or community with distinctive social practices (for example, being a surfer, a yoga devotee, or a bird watcher). Gee is at pains to point out that these four views are not separate from each other. For example, being an older person may be a state of nature (living to, say, eighty-five years of age); an institutional position (for example, living in an elder-care facility); a discursive position (being recognized and talked about by others as old); and an affiliation (for example, participating in activities for older people). Despite their overlap, these categories help us ask questions about how identities are formed and sustained. To continue the example of older persons, I recall a debate about a catchphrase used to promote Senior Citizens Week in Sydney. The catchphrase originally proposed was, "You are as young as you feel." The objection to this is that it valorizes youth—and it leaves no space for people who actually feel their age to thereby feel good about themselves. The catchphrase was eventually replaced by "Age adds value"—which focuses on the positive aspects of aging without the "youth" tagline. This is a good example of a discursive identity's being resisted and it points to the ways in which discourses compete in fleshing out what it means to be "a certain kind of person." It also points to the role of discourse in forming and sustaining identities.

Although historical usage reveals a significant overlap between the terms *identity* and *self*, the use of identity signals a shift toward the social side of the individual-social dichotomy. From the point of view of individual psychology, *identity* (and its correlate *identification*) are terms that can be harnessed to explain how the social becomes a constituent part of individual psychology. From a social perspective it is clear that identities can be resisted, contested, and negotiated by challenging the interpretive systems underlying them, such as traditions, rules of institutions, social norms, ways of talking about people, and views of what is natural. This is of course recognizable as the terrain of identity

politics, in which marginalized groups seek to have their identities recognized—not tolerated or included—but recognized *as*, say, women, indigenous people, African Americans, immigrants, or lesbians. But the language and practices of identity politics, at least for some, contain remnants of an inner, almost essentialist self that directs actions and makes choices. The attempt to transform social practices through group and individual "consciousness raising," and the call for "authenticity" and "self-determination," are testimony to this. The shift to subjectivity can be seen partly as a response to this criticism.

Subjectivity

Blackman et al. (2008) provide an excellent account of the emergence of the term *subjectivity*, with all its dense theoretical twist and turns. But rather than recount their analysis it is more productive to ask, What problem is being addressed by the shift to subjectivity? It appears that the problem is the ways in which psychological understandings of the self have dominated academe, professional psychology, and everyday life for much of the twentieth century. Critics have portrayed psychology as promoting a version of the self as a normative, unitary, coherent, and ahistorical entity (see, for example, Rose, 1998). They alert us to the political problem with this, namely that such a conception leads to the portrayal of "acceptable selves" in normative or essentialist terms, thus disallowing and delegitimizing alternative and minority ways of being. As Bell (2010) points out, such a conceptualization of the self was unacceptable to many of the intellectual, social, and political movements of the twentieth century, such as Marxism, feminism, antipsychiatry, postcolonialism, and cultural studies:

> The post-war expansion of university education had seen huge numbers of hapless humanities students respectably schooled in Psychology, albeit an innocently

> empirical, eclectically humanistic psychology. The new critics saw in this "science," conformism and intellectual timidity, positivism and political conservatism. . . . [C]onventional psychiatry and psychology, aimed at "adjusting" people to "reality," were increasingly derided. Thomas Szasz, RD Laing, Gregory Bateson, and others agreed with the French critics of psychiatric models of "normality" and opposed the psychiatrically sanctioned control of "patients." Mental illness was a "myth," said Szasz; "asylums" were merely prisons reinforcing the deadening conformity of other institutions like the school and family [Bell, p. 58].

In so far as psychology promotes a "normative" self, it is seen as an instrument of regulation and control, exercising its influence across all spheres of human activity, such as workplaces, schools, prisons, child rearing, sports, health, eldercare, urban living, and the military. It does so by deploying its various techniques to these spheres—most notably psychological tests, questionnaires, or surveys designed to measure such stable, normative psychological characteristics as intelligence, aptitude, personality, attitudes, and values. In this way the discipline and practice of psychology, together with the adoption of psychological ways of thinking in the general population, can be read as providing the basis for people to actively participate in their own subjection. It is worth noting in this respect the highly emotive nature of the critique of psychology and its demonization as the source and primary agent of the "scourges of essentialism, reductionism and dualism" (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 17).

As a normalizing and essentializing practice, psychology has been resisted in two important ways. Politically this resistance took the form of a new celebration of difference and diversity, with the purpose of opening up spaces for previously marginalized and less powerful groups, so that "difference" no longer equated

with "deviance" from an established norm. From a scholarly point of view this resistance took the form of a new understanding of the self as *solely* a sociocultural phenomenon—signaled by the use of the term *subjectivity*.

Those who have adopted the term *subjectivity* have in common "the turn to language, signs and discourse as the site through which subjects are formed" (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 3). This represents a shift from analyzing the psychological interior of persons to analyzing the exterior realm of language, signs, and discourses. For example, as Bell (2010) explains, a key approach of cultural studies is to consider cultural phenomena as texts and to deconstruct various texts to unveil the kind of work they do. Texts in this sense can be understood as any cultural phenomena that convey meaning, so that movies, literature, advertising, cooking, music, and of course disciplines, such as psychology, can all be analyzed as texts. The self too is seen as a text—there is no sovereign self, there are only subjects created through discourse. For example, a person can be said to occupy a gendered "subject position," which is sociological and discursive as opposed to psychobiological (see Bell, 2010). According to this view the subject is not to be understood as some kind of entity that stands opposed to the powerful effects of culture; rather it is already one of its effects. Whereas the term *identity* emphasizes the social side of the individual-social dichotomy, the term *subjectivity* dissolves the dichotomy, largely because the individual as such vanishes. The self is pure fiction, and those who attempt to enumerate its qualities are duped into promoting a version of the "truth" that controls and regulates both them and others. Given that the claim to truth is abandoned, it is clear at this point that the key driver behind the analysis of subjectivity is political in nature.

This radical theorization of subjectivity in solely sociocultural terms leads to some significant logical difficulties—not the least of which is the problem of how we come to identify with one socially produced representation and not another (see Bell,

2010, for a more detailed analysis, and Blackman et al., 2008, p. 8). Also, there is the difficulty of accounting for the agency of the subject in resisting control and regulation if the subject is completely constituted in sociocultural terms. For this reason, writers working within this sociocultural tradition now acknowledge the limitations of a purely sociocultural analysis. For example, Blackman et al., with reference to the work of Foucault, ask, "Might we not accept the full significance of Foucault's important arguments concerning the differentiation and production of individuals and not still suggest that the 'subjectivity' of such individuals is not wholly accounted for by power, discourse and historical circumstance?" (p. 9). They answer in the affirmative, arguing that we need to take into account actual bodies and how they modulate and augment subjectivity. They state their case in a rather timid appeal to their would-be critics:

> We are thus emphatically not calling for a return to a naïve individualizing humanism, to de-socialized, a-historical categories of explanation, or to an essentialist inner mechanics of psychological functioning. However, notwithstanding this aversion to de-politicized modes of explanation, to the multiple problems associated with reductive psychological individualism, we remain nevertheless interested in an exploration of those ostensibly psychological frameworks and vernaculars—contingent as they may be—that may enable even a temporary hold on the unique density and complexity of subjectivity which is always more than a derivative formation. There is far more work to be done, for example, in linking the current recourse to affect, central to much contemporary sociological and cultural studies work, with models of psychical or neurological functioning that do not bring in psychological individualism through the back door [Blackman et al., p. 10].

Elizabeth Grosz, in an interview in the *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, is more forthright in her disavowal of purely cultural and discursive analysis: "Nature or materiality have no identity in the sense that they are continually changing, continually emerging as new. Once we have a dynamic notion of nature, then culture cannot be seen as that which animates nature. Nature is already animated, and culture borrows its energy from nature. So it is not as if culture is the transformation of nature: culture is the fruition, the culmination of nature. Culture is no longer understood as uniquely human or as a thoroughly linguistic creation" (quoted in Kontturi and Tiainen, 2007, p. 248).

The preceding quotations, from "insiders," so to speak, illustrate that the extreme view of subjectivity as solely a discursive phenomenon has had its day. But there is no doubt that the use of the term has done its work and left its mark, particularly in the way those psychologists who continue to use the term *self* have taken up its historical and discursive dimensions in their theoretical work.

Although there is considerable overlap in the way self, identity, and subjectivity have been used, it is fair to say that the adoption of one term over another tends to signal a particular position on a range of theoretical issues. One issue that is central to the debate is how to conceive of the relationship between the "outside" and the "inside": that is, the relationship between society and the person. An important dimension of this debate is the assumptions that are made about the relative depth and thickness of "human material." Authors du Gay, Evans, and Redman (2000) cite psychoanalysis as having a relatively "thick" view of human material in that it has an elaborate conception of the dynamic "inner" history of the individual that is set against his or her "external" experience of the world. In contrast, theories of subjectivity "presuppose only a minimal or 'thin' conception of the human material on which history operates . . . where the representation of human beings as interiorized and psychologized entities is treated as an historical instance and not as a given" (p. 4).

One's position on this dimension thus serves to demarcate vastly different theoretical positions with vastly different implications for education, therapy, management, and other "interventions in the name of subjectivity" (to borrow a phrase from Rose, 1998, p. 65).

Throughout this book I use the term *self* for pragmatic purposes: to avoid the repetition of the three terms *self*, *identity*, and *subjectivity*, and to admit into the analysis some standard social science approaches that would be denied by the term *subjectivity*. It also signals my interest in how psychological understandings of the self have shifted in response to the critique of those who see such psychological constructions as a form of regulation and control. It also foreshadows a central argument of this book: that individuals can be agents in their own formation by understanding and acting on the circumstances and forces that surround and shape them.

Table 1.1 sets out some of the main ways in which the relationship between self and society has been theorized. It serves to highlight the assumptions we make when we explicitly engage in educational or other interventions in the name of personal change. Broadly speaking, the conceptions of the self in the left-hand column align with the various processes of social impact in the right-hand column, allowing for some crossover.

What are we attempting to do when we intervene in the name of personal change? Are we fundamentally concerned with

Table 1.1 Conceptualizing the Relationship Between Self and Society

Conceptions of the Self	Input of society
Authentic or real self	Distortion
Autonomous self	Shaping
Repressed self	Oppression and domination
Socially constructed self	Discourse
Storied self	Constraining and generating

Source: Adapted from Tennant, 2005.

exposing and undoing the distortions imposed by society? For example, in a typical group learning activity, should we focus on how our participants have developed "false consciousness" or live repressed lives through exposure to oppressive social forces? Are we simply engaged in an exercise to reshape participants' views of themselves and their relationships? Are we encouraging alternative readings of experience so that dominant readings can be challenged? Do we promote the practice of "self-authorship"—creating oneself through narrative? Are we providing a different framework for participants to understand their interpersonal relationships and therefore themselves? And to what end are these interventions aimed? Is there a "real" self to be discovered that has hitherto been buried and hidden from our awareness? Are we content to aim for a less repressed and therefore more conscious self who can engage in life without the debilitating burden of excessive guilt and self-doubt? Are we simply seeking a more autonomous self who can exercise agency and choice through an awareness of and resistance to the forces shaping his or her life? Do we wish to encourage participants to develop coherent, satisfying self-narratives, or perhaps to assist them in understanding the multiple narratives played out in their lives with a view to exploring still further possibilities?

Such questions as these may serve to frame an educational intent, but they can also be used to critically analyze the strategies and practices deployed in the name of learning for change. There is of course a rich history of techniques and practices in religion, philosophy, psychology, and management. All have in common an invitation for people to "act upon themselves" in various ways. Such techniques are explored further in Chapters Seven through Ten under these headings: knowing oneself, controlling oneself, caring for oneself, and (re)creating oneself. Although these categories cut across the various conceptions of self and society examined in earlier chapters, they can be used in combination to critically analyze interventions in the name of the self.